(a) whether there has been an increase in the celebrations of Indian festivals in foreign countries during the last few years;

(b) if so, the names of festivals and places where celebrations are organized collectively;

(c) whether Government provides them any help; and

(d) whether foreign Government also provides assistance, if so, the names of the countries?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations coordinated the holding of the Festival of India in Brussels from October, 2006 to January, 2007 and Festival of India in Japan from December, 2006 to December, 2007. The two Prime Ministers recently inaugurated the Year of Russia in India on 12th February, 2008. The Year of India in Russia is planned for the year 2009. A Festival of India is also being organised in the Netherlands in November, 2008.

(c) and (d) These events are organised on the basis of reciprocity. The standard norms provide for sharing of financial commitments. The sending side pays for international travel of artistes and performance fee. The sending side also bears the cost of freight of equipment and insurance of exhibits. The receiving side pays for boarding and lodging of the groups, domestic travel and presentation cost.

Indian soldiers in jails of Pakistan

2706. SHRI ABDUL WAHAB PEEVEE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether some Indian soldiers are interned in Pakistan jails;

(b) whether it is also a fact that a Flag Officer of the Indian Air Force, belonging to 20th squadron A-7 of the Indian Air Force has also been lodged in Pak jail since 1971;

(c) whether the relatives of the PoW (Prisoners of War) who hails from Kerala, has approached Government to trace the officer; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) 74 Missing Defence Personnel including 54 since 1971 are believed to be in jail in Pakistan. Shri K.P. Muraleedharan, a Flying Officer of Indian Air Force is believed to be amongst them.

(c) and (d) Yes. Government have received a representation from his sister. She has been informed of the efforts Government are making to trace Missing Defence Personnel in Pakistan..

Help to Sikh militancy

2707. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:
SHRI AMAR SINGH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware that Pakistan's ISI is making all out bid to revive Sikh militancy in India;

(b) whether it is a fact that ISI is planning to revive militancy from U.S.A., Canada, Germany, U.K., France besides Pakistan as per latest intelligence inputs;

(c) if so, whether Government has taken up this matter with those countries to check the activities of militants; and

(d) if so, the results thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (d) Government monitor all developments with a bearing on national security and have been taking measures deemed appropriate.

Starting of "Passport Seva" Plan

2708. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL:
SHRI DARA SINGH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has initiated an ambitious "Passport Seva" plan to overhaul the way passports are being issued;

(b) the number of Passports including Passports under "Tatkal" scheme that were issued during the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 till January, 2008;

(c) whether before introducing new plan, Government had undertaken any study to emulate best practices available in other developed countries so as to cope with 18 per cent growth rate annually;

(d) if so, whether efficiency, security, training of employees, opening of more public dealing counters/passport outlets etc. to minimize passport delivery time, considered by Government; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) The Government had entrusted the National Institute of Smart Government (NISG), Hyderabad, with the task of undertaking a time-bound study on the passport issuance system, including its IT aspects with the objective to deliver passport related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible and reliable manner. NISG has submitted its report, which has been accepted by the Government, and it has been decided to launch the "Passport Seva Project".

(b) The number of passports including passports under "Tatkal" scheme that were issued during the years 2005, 2006, 2007, and up to January 2008, are as under:

2005	2006	2007	January 2008
3570730	4441768	4941560	308368

(c) The time-bound study that was carried out by NISG included study of best practices available in other developed countries.

(d) and (e) As for efficiency, the Project is expected to result in the issue of passports within 3 days in cases not requiring police verification or those requiring post-issuance police verification; and in cases, which require pre-police verification, within 3 days after